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The President's Daily Brief

23 March 1972

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

In the Laos fighting, irregular forces retook two positions on Skyline Ridge yesterday but later were forced back by enemy mortar and artillery fire.
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The Cypriot bishops have repeated in strong terms their request that President Makarios resign and the threat of violence on the island again is increasing. (Page 2)

Pressure is building on the Israeli Government to define its ultimate aims with regard to the occupied territories. (Page 3)

Pakistani President Bhutto's visit to Moscow appears to have reduced some of the bitterness between the two governments. (Page 4)

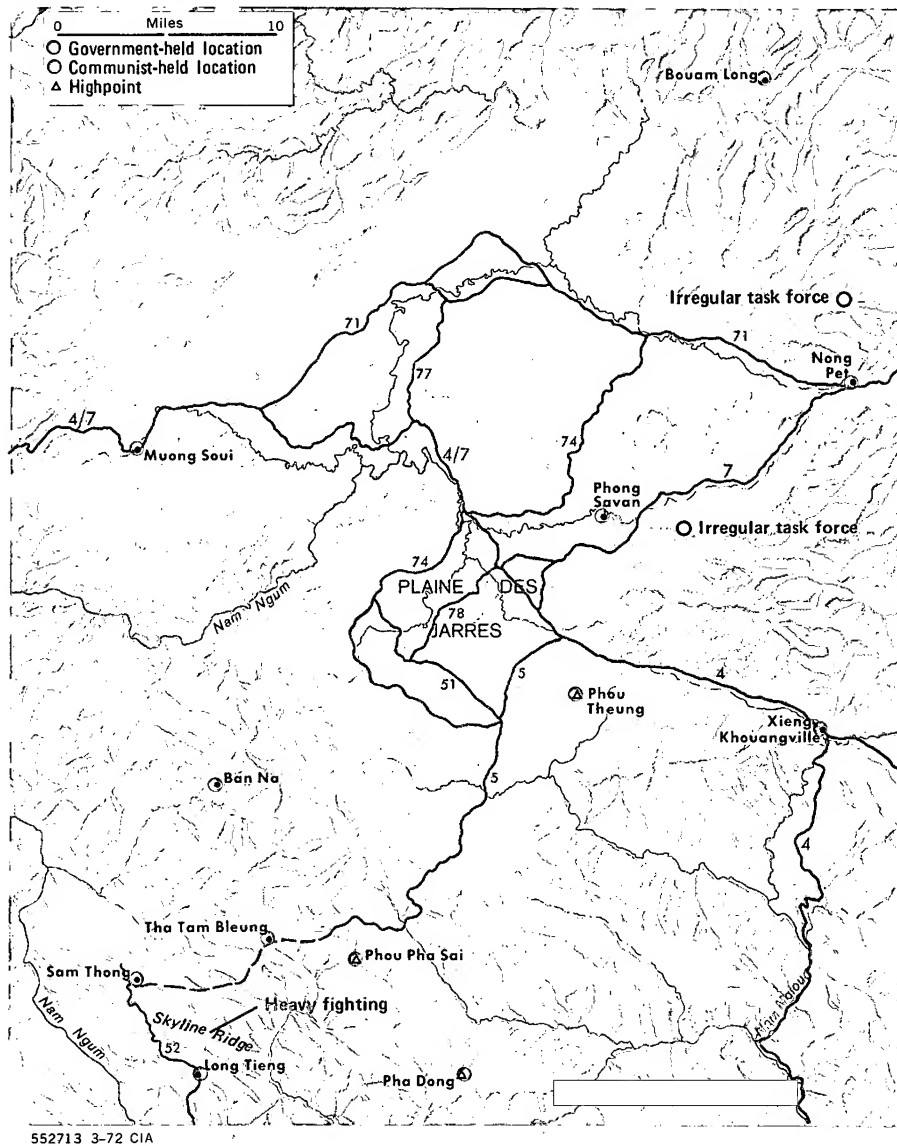
Rising anti-American sentiment in Bangladesh may lead to violence this weekend. (Page 4)

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LAOS: PLAINE DES JARRES AREA



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LAOS

Irregular forces retook two positions at the western end of Skyline Ridge on Wednesday, but hours later were forced back by enemy mortar and artillery fire. Government artillery fire and air strikes forced the Communists to withdraw from the center of the ridge, but irregulars have not re-occupied the area. This leaves the government forces holding five positions and the Communists two, while two are unoccupied.

Over 600 fresh troops were airlifted into Long Tieng yesterday.

The arrival of this force should bolster the morale of the irregulars defending the base and improve Vang Pao's capability for defense and counterattack. About 550 troops driven from the Sam Thong area have also arrived, but they presumably will need some rest before they can participate in combat.

To the east of the Plaine des Jarres, advance elements of one of Vang Pao's task forces are about three miles from Phong Savan, once a major enemy storage area. Elements from the other force have reached high ground overlooking Nong Pet, at the junction of two important supply roads. A ground observer reports that five tanks are north of Nong Pet, and intercepts indicate that elements from the North Vietnamese 866th and 174th regiments are preparing to engage the irregulars.

There is as yet no evidence that Vang Pao's new operations have diverted any Communist troops from the siege at Long Tieng.

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CYPRUS

Athens appears to be increasing its pressure on President Makarios. At a meeting yesterday, the Cypriot bishops rejected Makarios' contention that his resignation could lead to a "national disaster" and repeated in strong terms their request that he step down as president.

Although Makarios had earlier told the bishops that he would quit if they insisted, his more likely course is to appeal for public support in an effort to demonstrate that the people will not permit him to resign. The police in Limassol, a city in southern Cyprus where two of the bishops are staying, are on full alert in anticipation of mass demonstrations, and the threat of violence on the island again is increasing.

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ISRAEL

Pressure is building on the government to define more specifically its ultimate aims with regard to the occupied territories. The main impulse for this activity, which involves leaders of political parties, senior government officials, and the press, seems to be a fear that the US might strike a deal with the USSR affecting Israel's borders during President Nixon's visit to Moscow.

According to an adviser to Prime Minister Meir who talked with US officials, senior Israeli officials suspect that the Soviets, as part of their strategy to neutralize a US-Chinese rapprochement, will inform the President that Moscow now accepts the Rogers plan, which calls for only minimal changes in the pre-1967 borders as part of a peace settlement. The Israelis fear this move would force the US to choose between opposing Israel or abandoning a long-standing policy and incurring serious losses in the Arab world.

In addition to this concern, King Husayn's unveiling of his proposal for the West Bank has helped to focus attention on the border problem. This has led Deputy Prime Minister Alon to reintroduce his 1967 plan for a settlement with Jordan. Alon claims that it is now possible to mobilize a large majority in the Knesset in support of his plan, which includes a 10- to 15-mile defensive strip held by Israel in the Jordan Valley, an Israeli-controlled connecting corridor with East Jordan, and other border adjustments in strategic areas. Speaking to the press on 21 March, Mrs. Meir said the "Alon Plan" is the minimum any cabinet minister would accept.

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NOTES

USSR-Pakistan: President Bhutto's visit to Moscow appears to have reduced some of the bitterness between the two governments. Moscow agreed to resume work on aid projects suspended during the war last December but apparently deferred to India on the question of peace negotiations by saying it would abstain from a role in such talks.

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Bangladesh: US officials in Dacca have received reports from Bengali sources that rising anti-American sentiment in Bangladesh may lead to violence on 25-26 March during celebrations marking the first anniversary of the independence movement. Speeches by local politicians alleging "imperialist conspiracies" against Bangladesh are aggravating anti-US feeling, as are American news reports, replayed in the local press, which many Bengalis believe reflect poorly on their country. Dacca is swollen with large numbers of unemployed displaced persons who may be responsive to an appeal to violence.

Yugoslavia-China:

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